



This allegorical Baroque frontispiece, flanked by statues of Cybele and Poseidon, captures the excitement for shell collecting which was to hold the European imagination throughout the eighteenth century. It was engraved by Jakob de Later after a drawing by Jan Goeree and, while it occurs in all of the Dutch editions of Rumphius, this is taken from the 1711 edition of the *Thesaurus*.

THE AMBONESE CURIOSITY CABINET BY
 GEORGIUS EVERHARDUS RUMPHIUS
 TRANSLATED, EDITED, ANNOTATED, AND WITH
 AN INTRODUCTION BY E.M. BEEKMAN¹

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This modern translation of the posthumous publication of Rumphius, *D'Amboinsche Rariteitkamer*, first published in Amsterdam in 1705 makes the entire text and plates available in English for the first time. Rumphius was among the first naturalists to record observations he had made in the field, and to give accurate records of the localities where his animals were found. He had a great talent for description and nomenclature. Many of the names he introduced were adopted later by Linnaeus. Since it was then still believed that all of nature had been created to benefit humans, Rumphius provided details on applied malacology, such as the use of shellfish as food, household articles, weapons, musical instruments, ornaments, drugs, charms, scent, and money. At a time when superstition and miracles were readily believed, he carefully recorded facts based on his own observations, but he was not totally adverse to including in his work what the Malay fishermen told him.

George Eberhard Rumpf [later latinized as Rumphius] (1627-1702) was born in Hanau on the Main River, where

¹Beekman, E.M. 1999. *The Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet. Translated, edited, annotated, and with an introduction.* pp. cxii, 567, 57 pls. Yale University Press, P.O. Box 209040, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-9040. \$45.00 Eric Beekman received a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1968. He is professor of Germanic languages at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a scholar of Dutch colonial literature as well as a translator of note.

his father was the architect for Count Ludwig von Solms-Greifenstein-Braunfels. It was at the Count's suggestion that the young Rumpf enlisted in the Venetian army. This army had been secretly bought by the Netherlands West Indies Company for service in Brazil, but the ship Rumpf had embarked upon at Texel, Netherlands, was captured by the Portuguese. For several years, he and his companions were retained for military service in Portugal. It was here that he heard of the marvels of the East, which in 1652 led him to enlist as a midshipman in the Netherlands East Indies Company. Soon after his arrival in Batavia (now Jakarta), then Java's largest settlement, Rumpf was sent to Ambon in the Moluccas, where he spent most of his life. Ambon is a small island, thirty-two miles long and ten miles wide, in the northern regions of the Banda Sea. It was the primary source of the clove, then, a much sought after spice. The Portuguese had first arrived there and departed with a cargo of this spice in 1511. They founded a settlement in 1521, but were later driven out by the Dutch.

Rumpf was soon transferred to the civilian service and was appointed an under-merchant in 1657. At about this time, he began to study the flora and fauna of Ambon. At length, on August 20, 1662, he sent, "to the Noble, Honored, Venerable, Wise, Provident, Highly Informed Masters, the Noble Chief Directors of the East Indies Company residing in Amsterdam", a small request for aid in his undertakings (Sirks, 1945). This request was granted, though Rumphius was never allowed to forget that the business of the Company came first. He went blind in 1670 and most of his drawings of shells were destroyed in the great fire that occurred in the city of Ambon in 1687. Jutting (1959) claimed that it was not known who prepared the new figures for his work, but some were done locally.

Rumphius was aided by his son, Paulus Augustus, who at least, is known to have drawn the portrait of the blind naturalist that occurs in all of the Dutch editions of his work containing shells. Many of the engravings were prepared from drawings made in Holland from cabinets of exotic shells (thus explaining the occasional Mediterranean species) by the well known artist Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717)². This, the *Amboinsche Rariteitkamer* appeared posthumously in 1705. The second section, pp. 57-166, pls. 17- 49 covers mollusks. Merian is known to have colored the plates in at least two copies of this edition presumably based on actual specimens. One is in the Artis Library, Amsterdam, formerly belonging to A. Vosmaer (1720-1799) sometime director of the royal zoological gardens near The Hague. The other was recently offered for sale by an Amsterdam dealer. Under the title, *Thesaurus Imaginum Piscium Testaceorum*, an edition consisting of only the plates with their explanations, a single page of introduction, and a frontispiece [reproduced here] appeared in Leiden in 1711, and was reissued there in 1739. The complete *Amboinsche Rariteitkamer* was republished in Amsterdam in 1741, finally in 1766 it was translated into German by P.L.S. Müller with the plates having been redrawn.

In recognition of his labors, Rumpf was elected to the Academia Naturae Curiosorum, founded at Schweinfurt (now in Bavaria, but then a free imperial city), in 1681 as member no. 98 and received the cognomen of "Plinius

² While working in the Dutch colony of Surinam in South America, where she spent two years, Merian first observed the bird-eating spider, the largest in the world, and illustrated it in her book *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*. This work was the culmination of her career as a zoological and botanical artist. (Dance, 1978: 50)

Indicus” which he was able to add proudly to the title pages of his works. The Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I granted the Academy imperial privileges, and from 1687 until 1870 it was known as Sacri Romani Imperii Academia Caesareo-Leopoldina Naturae Curiosorum, being located in a number of German cities. It found a permanent haven in Halle in 1878.

The cornerstone of our system of binomial nomenclature is the 10th edition of Linnaeus’ *Systema Naturae* published in 1758. Some 90 works were quoted with references to mollusks, and all but two of these were located by Boss (1988), both since found, see note on p. 108). Linnaeus cited over 200 of Rumphius’ figures, and since the latter gave most of his mollusks binomial names, Linnaeus transferred 32 of them directly into his own work. All of the figured shells were identified, and their nomenclature revised by Martens (1902). The nomenclature was updated by Strack ([in] Beekman, 1999: xiii-xxvi).

At the insistence of his superiors, Rumphius sold what must have been a rather complete collection of some 360 species of shells, plus other curiosities and several plants, to Cosimo III de Medici (1642-1723), Grand-Duke of Tuscany in 1682. According to Targioni Tozzetti (1903) these shells were transferred from the Imperial Gallery to the Museum of Physics and Natural History after its founding in 1778 (now Museo Zoologia dell’ Università degli studi di Firenze), though he could not locate them. Some of the duplicates, given to Niccolo Gualtieri (1688-1744) by Cosimo’s son, are said to be in the Museo di Paleontologia, Pisa. Dijkstra (1997: 113) in 1990 visited what is now the Museo di Storia Naturale e del Territorio of the University of Pisa, at Certosi di Calci, near Pisa, but

failed to be able to identify for sure any shells that might have come from Rumphius. In the introduction to his sumptuous iconography of his own collection, *Index Testarum Conchyliorum* (1742: xvi), Gualtieri mentions the work of Rumphius (1705) but does not indicate whether any of his figures were based on the latter's specimens.

Francois Valentijn (1666-1725), a cleric of the Dutch Reformed Church, was sent to the East Indies where he remained for a decade. His "brother-in-law and bosom-friend," Rumphius in Ambon, encouraged him to collect natural objects and to make observations. The eventual result was five quarto volumes titled *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* (1724-26), in which he described all aspects of life and commerce as well as the natural history of the islands. When back in Holland, Valentijn had access to the unpublished manuscript and plates of Rumphius' *Amboinsch Dierboek*; and made such free use of them that Rumphius' important manuscript was never printed, and has since vanished. Included in Volume 3, Part 2 (pp. 517-586) of Valentijn's compendium are 16 plates of shells which he offered as being supplementary to those in the *Amboinsche Rariteitkamer*, as well as two other plates of supposed natural objects. One of these includes some improbable fishes and a mermaid, all pirated from earlier versions in a work by Renard (1719). The mermaid's mammary dower is vastly improved upon as well as her overall attractiveness, and is mentioned here, to indicate that, unlike Rumphius, Valentijn was quite credulous. Valentijn's shells, fish and mermaid were issued as a separate publication by J. von Keulen in Amsterdam in 1754, and appeared again translated in the German by P.L.S. Müller during 1773, with the plates redrawn, the mermaid characteristically becoming more Nordic.

Albert S. Bickmore was dismissed as a student by Louis Agassiz, the founder of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, because Bickmore did unauthorized fundraising for his Ambon expedition. He was, however, successful and in 1865, he went to recollect the shells figured by Rumphius, "on the very points and head lands, and in the very bays, where Rumphius' specimens were found" (Bickmore, 1869: 14). The book *Travels in the East Indian Archipelago* appeared in 1869, but the results of the actual scientific purpose of the trip were never published, nor is it known what happened to the shells. In 1869, Bickmore was a principal founder of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City and its first curator of the Department of Public Instruction. Theodore Roosevelt, father of the president, and J. Pierpont Morgan were among the first trustees. John David Wolfe was elected first president. It was his daughter, Catherine Lorillard Wolfe, who presented the John C. Jay collection of shells and conchological library to the Museum in his memory. Strack (1993: 15) reported that, "Bickmore deposited one ton of specimens with the museum, but, except for a few shells that were identified as belonging to the Bickmore collection by Dr. W. Emerson, it is not possible to determine what the deposited specimens were." Strack and his associates mounted the "Rumphius Biohistorical Expedition" and since its return in 1990 have been preparing and publishing new identifications of the animals mentioned by Rumphius as part of a monographic series on the marine invertebrate fauna of Ambon.

Beekman has not only translated Rumphius' work, but has provided exhaustive annotations, buttressed by extensive bibliographical and archival references on seemingly every biological, historical, and literary aspect.

Beekman's translation has the advantage over the Dutch and German editions in that the colloquial and archaic Malay terms which Rumphius liberally sprinkled throughout his text are at last translated into a western language. Finally, the excellent, detailed introduction on the life and times of Rumphius accompanying Beekman's translation itself makes the work worth its price.

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